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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000130

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DEPT FOR AF/W
PLEASE PASS ALSO TO PEACE CORPS, ALSO FOR AID/AA
TREASURY FOR OFFICE OF AFRICAN NATIONS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PINS](#) [EAID](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: NO FIREWORKS AT UNION PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: CONAKRY 129 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Officer Jessica Davis Ba. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) On February 1, the CNTG-USTG union coalition held its first press conference since the suspension of the general strike on January 27. The event was ostensibly organized to report on meetings between the visiting representatives from international labor organizations and various local actors, including victims of strike-related violence. International labor representatives gave strong moral support to the efforts of the Guinean federation, and provided some financial assistance to victims of violence and their families. Although many expected a harsh and accusatory message by local union leaders, speakers transmitted a balanced message to journalists, acknowledging government efforts to uphold the signed accord. They expressed concern that although they were assured by government officials that all detainees had been released, at least 13 persons remain in prison for their involvement in the strike. While they did not give any firm deadline, the unions said that if the government does not appoint a prime minister soon, or chooses a strawman for the job, they will resume the general strike. End Summary.

Guinea's Unions Acknowledge Government Efforts

¶2. (SBU) While many expected fireworks, and some may have hoped for a call to action, the union press conference February 1 remained controlled and professional. Union leaders Rabiattou Serah Diallo, CNTG General Secretary, and Ibrahima Fofana, USTG General Secretary, acknowledged government efforts to uphold the tripartite agreement signed on January 27 by taking measures to make rice and fuel available at lower fixed prices. They stated that while Conte had taken the first step in signing the decree outlining the attributions of a prime minister, they expected the appointment "yesterday" of an individual to fill this position. When asked by one of the journalists if she would be willing to serve as a minister, Diallo emphatically replied, "Absolutely not. We are the guardians of the process, we cannot be part of it. We have a mission and we will pursue it until the very end."

¶3. (SBU) The unions gave no date by which they expected President Conte to appoint a prime minister. Instead, they said they will give the government the opportunity to uphold its promises, but that Guinea's workers cannot wait for long. When asked what they would do if Conte appointed a strawman

to the position, Diallo and Fofana both stated, "We will once again call for a general strike." Contrary to rumors that a strike will begin on February 5, the union leaders did not set any specific deadlines or describe planned actions.

International Union Solidarity

¶4. (SBU) As a member of international trade union federations, the CNTG-USTG union coalition enjoyed significant international labor support for its efforts during the strike. Over the past week, the unions hosted Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (CSI), and his associates, CSI boasts over 168 million members in 153 countries. In addition to CSI, Guinea's union leaders also publicly thanked Johanna Walbrave, Director of the Department of Social Dialogue from the International Labor Organization (ILO), and leaders from labor coalitions in Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Togo.

¶5. (SBU) After being introduced by Fofana, Guy Ryder told the press that he and his comrades were in Guinea to show solidarity and support for Guinea's labor movement and for the general strike to defend worker's rights. Ryder said this trip marks the first official visit of support by CSI since its creation in 2006. Ryder said that since being elected as a member of CSI's Executive Bureau, Rabiadou Serah Diallo has become a symbol of the continuing struggle for workers worldwide. He emphasized that in meetings with the First Lady, the Minister of State for Presidential Affairs Eugene Camara and the Presidents of the Supreme Court, National Assembly, and Economic and Social Council, international labor and local union leaders insisted that all

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actors must abide by the commitments in the January 27 tripartite agreement.

"They Will Not Remain Unpunished"

¶6. (SBU) Ryder said they saw the brutal and inhumane results of actions by Guinea's security forces during visits to victims still hospitalized. Ryder told the journalists that contrary to assurances by Minister of State Camara and Supreme Court President Lamine Sidime, at least 13 persons were still being held in Conakry's central prison and more may be in prisons in the interior for activities in connection with the strike. He and Guinea's union leaders planned to meet with the Minister of Justice directly following the press conference to urge their release. (Note: Sources at the prison confirm that 7 of the 13 detainees were released after the union meeting with the Minister of Justice. The other cases are still under review.)

¶7. (SBU) In addition to adherence to the signed protocol, Ryder called on the Guinean government to establish a national committee to investigate the killings and prosecute the perpetrators. When asked if there should be an international process, Ryder replied that we should first give the government the opportunity, but if this fails, "They will not remain unpunished." Ryder cautioned that CSI is in close contact with European Union Commissioner for Humanitarian Development Louis Michel and has urged the EC to weigh recent events when considering disbursement of funds under the 9th EFD. Ryder said that if the government fails to bring the killers to justice, CSI will use its influence to make sure that benefits from the IMF, World Bank and other institutions are suspended until the government acts. (Note: The Minister of Justice later told the unions he would establish a committee of investigation, to include union representatives and representatives from several Ministries, including Security. We do not yet know if he has the agreement of other members of the government for this

initiative.)

¶8. (SBU) The international labor delegation reportedly provided funds (USD 10,000 and a sum in euros) for assisting victims of violence and their families.

¶8. (C) Comment. Many Guineans expected (and even hoped) that the unions would use their press conference to renew a call to action. Instead, the unions struck a resolute, but collaborative tone. Some union members have accused the leaders of "selling out" by acknowledging government efforts to date. With no firm deadline for the appointment of a prime minister, the unions have diminished leverage to speed the government search for the "right" person. Rallying international support, Guinea's unions are assuring that any future action will have the attention of a global audience, hoping to minimize violence while forcing reforms. However, union leaders have told us privately that they cannot control the street. While there is no immediate union call for action, they caution that the population will not wait indefinitely for the government to adhere to the number one demand to appoint a prime minister to head a consensus government.

MCDONALD